

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 0441

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PBOR, PEPR, EC, PE
SUBJECT: BORDER PROBLEM APPEARS RESOLVED - FOR THE TIME BEING

REFS: (A) QUITO 0421, (B) LIMA 0559

1. SUMMARY: ARMY CHIEFS OF STAFF RICHTER OF PERU AND CABRERA OF ECUADOR APPARENTLY AGREED AT THEIR JAN 20 MEETING ON MEASURES TO ALLEVIATE BORDER TENSIONS, THUS SOLVING PROBLEM FOR NOW. ANNOUNCEMENT ON JAN 19 THAT PERUVIAN GENERAL STRIKE HAD BEEN CANCELLED CONFIRMED FOR MANY ECUADOREANS THEIR SPSPICIONS THAT BORDER PROBLEM WAS FUNCTION OF INTERNAL PERUVIAN POLITICS. REAPPEARANCE OF BORDER PROBLEM, AFTER OVER-DONE "WAS SCARE" OF DECEMBER 1976 HIGHLIGHTS THE IMPER-
ATIVE NEED FOR SOME RESOLUTION OF THE BORDER PROBLEM IN GENERAL. END SUMMARY.

2. MEETING ON JAN 20 BETWEEN ECUADOREAN AND PERUVIAN ARMY CHIEFS OF STAFF, HELD IN THE BORDER TOWNS OF AGUAS VERDES AND HUAQUILLAS, WAS APPARENTLY A SUCCESS.

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INTELLIGENCE DIRECTORS AND BORDER MILITARY ZONE COMMANDERS ALSO MET AT THE SAME TIME AND DISCUSSED SUBSIDIARY ISSUES. ONE MAJOR ELEMENT OF AGREEMENT WAS APPARENTLY THAT BOTH SIDES WOULD ABANDON FORWARD OUTPOSTS AND KEEP BORDER UNITS AT THEIR MAIN BASES. THIS STEP WAS PROBABLY WEL-
COMED BY BOTH SIDES, BOTH OF WHICH SHARE PROBLEMS OF SUPPLYING AND COMMUNICATING WITH THESE OUTPOSTS, AND WILL

REDUCE CHANCES FOR CLASHES.

3. TENSIONS IN QUITO DIMINISHED QUITE RAPIDLY IN THE WAKE OF THOSE MEETINGS. THOSE ECUADOREAN UNITS WHICH HAD BEEN PUT ON ALERT -- EL ORO BDE., LOJA BDE., CUENCA BDE., AND 1ST ARMOR BDE., -- WERE TAKEN OFF OF THAT STATUS AROUND 2000 HOURS ON JAN 10. THE SUBSEQUENT ANNOUNCEMENT THAT PERUVIAN GENERAL STRIKE CALLED FOR JAN 23 HAD BEEN CANCELLED, WHICH APPEARED IN QUITO PAPERS THE MORNING OF JAN 21, BOTH CONFIRMED FOR ECUADOREANS THEIR SUSPICIONS THAT INCEREASE IN TENSIONS WAS FOR DOMESTIC PERUVIAN POLITICAL REASONS, AND CONTRIBUTED TO TENSIONS HERE AS MOST ECUADOREANS ASSUMED GOP HAD ACHEIVED ITS INTENDED DOMESTIC GOAL.

4. COMMENT: TASK NOW IS ONE OF DAMAGE ASSESSMENT. GOE WILL MOVE QUICKLY, WE BELIEVE, TO ASCERTAIN WHETHER GOP WILL USE BORDER INCIDENTS AS EXCUSE TO CANCEL TALKS ON ECUADOREAN ACCESS TO THE AMAZON. FOREIGN MINISTRY BELIEVES THIS INCIDENT UNDERLINES IMPERATIVE NEED FOR THOSE TALKS TO CONTINUE. PRESUMABLY EC ARMY WILL ALSO REASSESS ITS SITUATION IN BORDER PROTECTION, INDLUDING PROBLEM OF SUPPLYING AND COMMUNICATING WITH TROOPS IN ISOLATED OUTPOSTS. EMBASSY SUSPECTS THAT AGREEMENT TO WITHDRAW FROM OUTPOSTS IN THE AREA IS SEEN BY EC ARMY AS A TEMPORARY MEASURE, AGREED TO AT LEAST IN PART TO PROVIDE CONFIDENTIAL

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THEM TIME TO PLAN AND SUPPORT THOSE OUTPOSTS BETTER. POTENTIAL FOR INCIDENTS WILL THUS UNDOUBTEDLY INCREASE AGAIN IN THE NEXT FEW MONTHS.

5. TIMING OF EVENTS WOULD SEEMINGLY GIVE CREDENCE TO ECUADOREAN SUSPICIONS THAT BORDER INCIDENT WAS PUBLICIZED TO SHORE UP A GOP WITH DIFFICULT INTERNAL PROBLEMS. TAKING SUCH A STEP HAS BEEN PAR FOR THE COURSE IN ECUADOREAN-PERUVIAN RELATIONS. ECUADOREANS HAVE POINTED OUT TO EMBOFFS ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS DURING THIS LATEST CRISIS THAT EX-PRESIDENT JOSE MARIA VELASCO IBARRA USED TO WAVE THE BLOODY FLAG OF PERUVIAN AGGRESSION EVERY TIME HIS DOMESTIC POLICIES ENCOUNTERED OPPOSITION.

6. INCIDENTS SUCH AS THIS, ALTHOUGH IN MOST CASES NOT DANGEROUS IN THEMSELVES, ARE OF CONCERN TO THE EMBASSY. FACT THAT BOTH GOVERNMENTS ARE VOLATILE, HAVE LIMITED CONTROL OVER INTERNAL INSTITUTIONS, HAVE LESS CONTROL OVER UNITS IN CONTACT, TEND TO OVERREACT TO REAL OR IMPLIED CHALLENGES, AND HISTORICALLY DISTRUST EACH OTHER, MEANS THAT A HARMLESS INCIDENT COULD PROVOKE A SERIOUS CLASH. THE WAR IN 1941 DEVELOPED OUT OF EXACTLY THOSE

KIND OF BORDER INCIDENTS.

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